



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Livestock & Farm Protection Task Force

JEFFERSON CITY – The current economic downturn has apparently led to a big increase in thefts on our farms and ranches. In just the last three years, the Missouri Highway Patrol has investigated more than 1,346 leads and recovered more than \$2.1 million in stolen agriculture property. State Agriculture Director Jon Hagler told reporters this week that thieves are stealing not just cattle but trucks and trailers to haul off the stolen livestock. In response to this growing threat to our livelihoods, Governor Nixon this week announced the creation of the Livestock & Farm Protection Task Force.

The task force will include representatives from the state Department of Agriculture, the Highway Patrol, the Missouri Department of Public Safety, the Missouri Sheriff's Association and the Missouri Cattlemen's Association. This group will work with our local law enforcement agencies to make sure they have the resources they need to pursue these crimes. The governor says the task force will be the farmer's first line of defense against the theft of livestock, equipment and farm chemicals.

The Missouri General Assembly addressed this issue during the 2009 session. House Bill 62, the omnibus crime bill, includes several provisions which increase the penalties for agricultural theft. For example, the bill changes the definition of livestock in regard to stealing. Right now it's a Class C felony to steal a horse, mule, cattle, swine, sheep or goat. The bill adds calves, ratite birds (such as emu and ostrich), farm-raised fish, llamas, alpaca, buffalo, elk and rabbits to the list of livestock under protection. The law also makes it a Class C felony to steal captive wildlife (such as pheasant or quail) that is held under permit issued by the conservation commission.

If the thief has a previous conviction for stealing animals and the value of the stolen livestock is greater than \$3,000, it becomes a Class B felony and the thief will be required to serve at least 80 percent of his sentence before becoming eligible for probation or parole.

HB 62 also deals with livestock sales. The new law (which becomes effective August 28) allows a law enforcement officer to inspect the records of any livestock sales or market licensee to determine the origin and destination of the livestock. If the officer finds something amiss, he can place a 24-hour hold order on the livestock.

These are tough times for all of us, but that is no excuse for stealing someone else's property. I thank the governor for creating this task force to respond to the increase in agricultural thefts, and I look forward to working with this group to put a stop to this serious threat to our state's number one industry.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.